

"PECULIAR" ORDER!

As Sholes was aware of the 'blind line' problem, so he was also aware that even as his keyboard arrangement was becoming 'universally' accepted; a number of users were expressing doubts about that 'peculiar' arrangement. Sholes was asked frequently why the keys were placed as they were on the keyboard. He apparently was embarrassed to reply the keys were switched around until they could reach the printing point without jamming and colliding. So it seems, he rather lamely said Densmore and the other partners had worked it out to keep the letters which most frequently occur together in words as far apart as possible in the circular type basket. But as lighter metals and more refined production methods became available, Sholes was aware people were less willing to accept this explanation.

(Actually, both Sholes and Densmore had worked on newspapers and were familiar with the printer's case which assorted type pieces according to the convenience of pick up with the most used type in bins nearest the printer. The q-w-e-r-t-y-u-i-o-p, etc. order which emerged after all the 'jams' and collisions of the type bars on the Sholes' machine had been resolved, reveals the two men did realize some of that printer's case. Unfortunately for modern typists, a printer picking out type from a bin and a typist striking keys by touch are so different as to motions required that a keyboard based on a printer's case cannot be an efficient keyboard.)

Densmore's comment with respect to the final keyboard arrangement--what would become known as the 'Universal' arrangement--was made in a letter he typed to his stepson on November 8, 1872. (It was election day, and he had stayed up all night--he and Sholes were losers as they had both voted for Horace Greeley over Ulysses S. Grant--and in the early dawn typed: 'Now about the change of key-board, this is

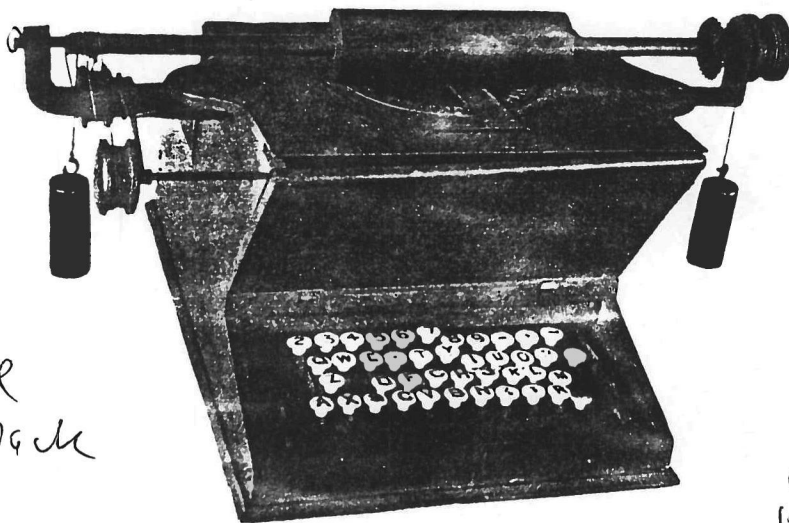
the second letter I have tried to write with this machine. When I began, it (the keyboard) was as new to me as if I had never learned any one. And there was this against it (the change)--I had to unlearn as well as learn. But now, at the close of this letter, I am beginning to become quite familiar with it. So I am confirmed it makes but little or no difference in fact about it. Of course, it is better to have them all alike, but the change was better to be made than not.'

LAST KEYBOARD, 1889

In 1881, Sholes applied for a patent (issued April 14, 1896, 558,428) in which he sought to reduce the effect of the 'blind line' mistake by use of an elliptical type bar basket rather than the circular one on his 'Ilion machine.' Apparently, it did not work out, as it never appeared on a single working model.

One of the patent drawings (Fig. 1), showed a fragment of a keyboard change he was also working on. On September 11, 1889, confined to his bed, Sholes signed the application for that new keyboard arrangement.

Sholes 'Last Keyboard' placed all the vowels on the right hand side of the home row. Of the ten most-used letters, four letters (E-A-O-I) are on the home row. No capital shift keys were provided. After his work on his tiny portable typewriter, Sholes was convinced only capital letters were needed on any typewriter. (It would be the Remington mechanics, not Sholes, who would design the first shift keys so one could type lower case as well as capital letters.) And, curiously, Sholes provided a space bar on each side of the keyboard similar to those placed on the new typewriter, the Caligraph, which was based on Sholes' own design and had been placed on the market to compete with his machine as manufactured by the Remington Company.



Sholes-Glidden Model, 1873

Built by Schwalbach

Carroll H. Blundell

word processor -
ref. 4192, KM as the best,
and women

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